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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Wednesday, February 19, 1936.

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "More About Moths." Information from the Bureau of Entomology, U. S. Department of Agriculture.

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One of the most expensive visitors you can entertain in your home this spring is the clothes moth. He may be small. But he has a thousand-dollar appetite. He can literally eat you out of house and home, for his menu includes furs and wool clothes, fine rugs and furniture coverings.

Indirectly also moths are costly. Many people spend a good deal of money buying worthless moth remedies. And then they have trouble with moths just the same. The entomologists at the Department of Agriculture have a list of commonly and mistakenly used "moth remedies" that actually have no effect at all on the clothes moth. This list includes tobacco extracts, dried lavender flowers; cayenne pepper or black pepper; allspice; salt, borax, eucalyptus leaves; and red cedar leaves. The entomologists have tried all these out carefully and find that they have no effect at all on the moth's health or appetite.

The most successful and also the cheapest way to fight moths is with absolute cleanliness and a tight clean place to store clothes. The two substances that moths don't like are naphthalene and paradichlorobenzene (para-di-klor-o-ben-zeen) properly used.

The battle against moths is neither difficult nor costly if you use cleanliness as your chief weapon. Clean all your wool clothes. Wash them or dry clean them, or carefully brush, air and sun them. Then you can put them away in tight, clean, moth-proof containers and have no fear of finding them full of holes when you come to get them next fall. The same is true of furs. Brush, air and sun furs carefully before you put them away.

The forgotten garments are the ones that usually suffer the most from moths. You intend to have those garments cleaned and put away in the spring, but you neglect the job for awhile. You leave these soiled articles hanging in a dark closet undisturbed or lying in a drawer. Well, now, look at it from the moth's point of view. That's Utopia for him. Give a moth a soiled article of wool or fur and a nice, quiet, dark place, and he'll just settle down happily to growing prosperous and raising a family in comfort. Those wool socks that Jack wore a couple of times and then left at the back of the drawer; or that knitted dress of Mary's with a grease spot or two on it on a hanger in the hall closet; Father's Sunday trousers, seldom used -- all these are just some common examples of the clothes that everyone forgets but the clothes moth.

So when the weather grows mild and the family begins to lay off its woollens and furs, then is the time to get those clothes cleaned and packed away in a safe place.

2/19/36

To be thoroughly safe, wash all clothes that are washable and have all others dry-cleaned. But a thorough brushing, shaking, airing and sunning will usually rid a garment of any eggs or larvae that might be in it. After the cleaning, get the clothes into safe storage as soon as possible. Don't let them hang around and collect more moths.

One way to pack clothes away safely is to wrap them with heavy unbroken paper and seal all the edges with gummed paper strips. Or you can hang dresses and coats in garment bags that are absolutely tight -- that have no tiny crack or opening for a hungry moth to enter. Be sure the bag is carefully sealed where the hanger comes out at the top.

That reminds me of the listener who wrote the other day to say that a bag she bought as "moth-proof" hadn't killed some moths inside at all. She had simply misunderstood the purpose of such a bag. A so-called moth-proof bag is to keep moths out but not to kill them. So, a bag of plain heavy paper is just as useful as a tar-paper bag, or a bag treated with cedar or pine oil. The value of the bag lies in its tightness, you see. So be sure it has no tiny opening around the hanger at the top where a very small insect could crawl in. And be sure all corners are secure. Be sure the fastening is absolutely tight. Then -- put in only garments that are clean and free from all moth eggs.

That reminds me of cedar chests. Many cedar chests are good storage places for clean clothes but do not harm moths that get in. The entomologists say that a good cedar chest made of red cedar heartwood which is at least three-fourths of an inch thick and has a tight cover of solid red cedar will kill the very young babies in the moth family -- that is, the newly hatched or very young larvae. But you can't depend on it to kill a moth in its flying stage, or to kill the eggs, or even the little eating larvae after they are half or full-grown. So to be safe, put clean clothes only in your chest -- clothes that are free from both moth eggs and worms when they go in.

Since trunks and even well-built boxes are not always entirely tight, any clothes stored in such places are safer if a pound of naphthalene or paradichlorobenzene crystals are sprinkled in with them. These crystals are inexpensive and keep moths out. If you prefer to use naphthalene, you can get it in the form of flakes or moth balls.

But don't make the mistake of thinking that clothes are safe if you just put some naphthalene or paradichlorobenzene in your clothes closet. These are effective remedies only in tight chests or compartments where the fumes from them can't escape so will penetrate every thread of your clothing. If the fumes from moth balls, flakes or crystals are to do damage to moths, they must be very concentrated.

So, once more now, remember that cleanliness is the safest and cheapest protection against moths -- cleanliness and a tight storage space. Naphthalene and paracichlorobenzene in the box or chest are added protection. These are 2 substances that the entomologists have found effective against moths. Plenty of other so-called remedies do no good at all.

